

Middle East church group backs women's ordination: Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches

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Representatives of Middle Eastern Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed churches have voted unanimously in favor of the ordination of women as pastors. "This is historic," said Jerusalem Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan after the January 12 decision of the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches meeting in Harissa, Lebanon.

Younan, the fellowship's outgoing president, said the decision by the 29 voting delegates, including two women, at the group's general assembly meant its 16 member churches were urged to open the door to the ordination of women pastors.

Rosangela Jarjour, the fellowship's general secretary, said in a January 15 e-mail that three churches had already accepted women's ordination as pastors: Younan's Lutheran church, the Cairo presbytery of the Evangelical Church in Egypt, and the diocese of Khartoum of the Episcopal Church in Sudan. Several other churches already ordain women as elders.

Younan, who developed the Harissa statement in Arabic, is bishop of the 3,000-member Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, whose headquarters are in Jerusalem.

An English translation states, "The sixth general assembly supports the ordination of the women in our churches in the position of ordained pastor and [their] partnership with men as an equal partner in decision-making. Therefore, we call on member churches to take leading steps in this concern."

A press release issued by the Younan's church said that delegates expressed support for the recommendation as well as concern about how their congregations would accept it.

Although Mary Mikhael, president of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, acknowledged that societal traditions presented an obstacle to the ordination of women, she also asked, "Who should reform who?"

The Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches was formed in 1974 to strengthen the mission and ministry of its member churches through the training of clergy and lay leaders and to promote unity through joint work and education. - *Stephen Brown, Ecumenical News International*